Goetterdaemmerung!

U.Va.-Tech: 54th Meeting

By BILL MILLSAPS

John Sprinkle’s home is York, Pa., where they make barbells. Williams comes from Cleveland where they manufacture snow and put out smog as kind of a sideline. Neither young man has the genealogical qualifications to make the First Families of Virginia.

For the past three years, however, both Williams and Sprinkle have spent a great deal of time in the Old Dominion while earning their educations with their shoulder pads. By this time, both have learned that a football meeting between Virginia and Virginia Tech isn’t just any old game.

Even though the wilder boosters of the Cavaliers try to make it seem so, it isn’t quite Goetterdaemmerung. But it is a biggie, and they play it for the 54th time since 1885 Saturday afternoon in Charlottesville.

Tech leads in the series, 26-23-4. The Hokies have won 13 of the last 16 games with the Cavaliers, and Williams was a key performer for U.Va. in its last victory, a 7-0 decision in 1970. Tech won in 1971, 64-3. “This is it,” said Williams, a 6-2, 210-pound senior defensive end. “...the rubber match.”

Sprinkle, a 6-2, 230-pound defensive tackle for the Hokies, is considerably more vehement. “The idea of losing to Virginia,” he said, “is totally disgusting.”

IT WILL BE the season opener for Virginia Tech, and Sprinkle. Tech coach Charlie Coffey and Hokie backers from Fairfax to Galax are praying their team will be better defensively in ’72 than it was in ’71.

Tech yielded an average of 24.7 points per game last season, and “totally disgusting” was one of the few strong phrases Coffey did NOT use in talking about his so-called defense. The Hokie defenders’ only bright moment was the shutout of Virginia.

“I don’t think we were all that bad last year,” said Sprinkle, who played the 1972 Tech spring game with a dislocated shoulder. Then he admitted that maybe it was pretty bad, after all.

“The season kind of dragged until we got to Virginia,” said Sprinkle, “and that peppepe us up. Until then, though, our guys on the defense didn’t have any confidence at all, either in themselves or in the rest of the guys on the unit. The guy playing next to you just didn’t expect you to make the plays.”

Now that the Hokies have more talent and depth on the defense (especially at linebacker), and all hands have had more than a year to learn the intricacies of the pro 4-3 defense, Sprinkle feels a bit better. “I don’t have the doubts I had last year,” he said. “I’m really confident.”

Sprinkle is well aware that Tech and Virginia currently take different philosophical approaches to the game of college football. He knows it would be a blow to the Tech Way should the Hokies lose. “Compared to them, we’re going big-time,” said Sprinkle, “but if we lose, I don’t think we’d fall apart.”

THE VIRGINIA defense brutalized South Carolina quarterback Bill Troup last Saturday night, Williams was a leader with five “sacks.” Against Tech, Williams & Friends will be zeroing in on a bigger, better and more protected target—Hokie star quarterback Don Strock.

Last year, Strock was the nation’s No. 2 passer with 2,577 yards. Against Virginia, he encountered a heavy rush and still completed 18 of 28 passes, most of them the short variety.

Williams is sure that Tech “will have a lot better pass blocking schemes” than did South Carolina, which left only a beleaguered fullback and a halfback to keep Troup from being bombed by Williams and Stanley Land, the Cavaliers’ other defensive end. “I’m sure coach Coffey wants no repeat of what we did to Troup,” said Williams.

“I don’t think they’ll be letting me go at the line of scrimmage. I’m pretty sure they’ll have a tackle blocking me on every pass play.”

The Cavaliers’ standout is a Strock admirer. “Strock has a very quick release,” said Williams, “and he does a very good job of picking out second and third receivers if his primary receiver is covered. I was just looking at some film today, and he can even throw falling down. Of course, he’s got a very strong, accurate arm.”

The people who came to last year’s Tech-Virginia game expected a high-scoring shoot-out and got what Williams called “a total flop, from an offensive standpoint. This year, I don’t think it will be a 40-game.”

The 30,000-plus who have tickets (at $7 each) certainly hope not.